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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSUL 000055

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SUBJECT: NINEWA: SOURCES CITE SECTARIAN STRIFE IN TAL AFAR

REF: A) MOSUL 51; B) MOSUL 23; C) MOSUL 30

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REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Tal Afar is frequently cited in the western media and by USG officials as a good news story in Iraq. Recently, however, we have also heard reports of increased sectarian strife. Some sources say Sunni and Shia conflict in southern Iraq and Baghdad has influenced relations between the two groups in western Ninewa. Others blame "sectarian forces" controlling the Interior and Defense Ministries in Baghdad. Sunni sources tend to be critical, while Shia discount most problems. Tal Afar has clearly made great strides since the violence of late 2005, but nervousness persists. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) PRT PolOff met with Sunni tribal leaders from Tal Afar at Provincial Joint Coordination Center (PJCC) in Mosul on May 25. In attendance was Noradeen Ali Mustafa of the Maqsood tribe, Ali Mohammed Saeed of the Halay Bak tribe, Mahmoud Ibrahim Al-Qado of the Khowerit tribe, Omer Mohammed Ibrahim of the Azdo tribe, Abdul-Nor Mohammed Nor of the Jablar/Tahhan tribe, and Dr. Yashar Abdulla Mahmoud of Turkoman Front party. PRT officials spoke to Aref Yousef of Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution of Iraq (SCIRI) and United Iraq Coalition (UIC) member Waly Ali Reda of Tal Afar on May 24.

SUNNI CLAIMS: SECTARIAN STRIFE

¶3. (C) Provincial officials and Sunnis from Tal Afar said tensions with Shia were rising (ref a). Dr. Mahmoud of Turkoman Front claimed to speak for Sunni tribal leaders from Tal Afar, saying they were victims of ongoing sectarian violence in the district since November 11, 2004. On that date Mahmoud said, former Tal Afar Chief of Police Ismael Faris, a Shia, fired 630 Sunni officer and replaced them with Shia from three tribes in area [NOTE: Mosul fell to terrorists in November 2004, causing the police to flee their positions in the city and province. Faris most likely used this incident as cover for removing Sunni police. Tribal leaders from Tal Afar acknowledged Faris was

complicit in nefarious activities that worsened tensions between Sunni and Shiite in the district (ref b)]. This, Mahmoud said, began a process of discrimination against Sunnis. He went on to describe Sunni complaints: There were no services, such as clean water and electricity in their villages, and the community believed they were being unfairly fingered for insurgent activity they were not supporting.

14. (C) Mahmoud said economic conditions in the district were worsening. This, and fears for their safety, caused Sunnis to flee for work and safety in Mosul, he claimed. Tal Afar was an historical trading center, he said, but now the markets were regularly closed and trading had moved farther west to Sinjar. Several parts of the city were abandoned, claimed Mahmoud, and terrorists were using vacant houses to conduct insurgent activities. When Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) or Coalition Forces (CF) captured the insurgents they were let go too soon. In addition, innocent people were held. Mahmoud believed this was the fault of a weak judicial system. He commended CF for working to improve security, justice, and protecting human rights. Meddling from the MOI and Ministry of Defense in Baghdad caused problems in the area, claimed Mahmoud (ref a). He suggested the Iraqi Army (IA) take control of security in Tal Afar since it was more reliable than the Iraqi Police (IP). Such a move, Mahmoud said, would improve security and allow displaced Sunnis to return to the city. Sheikh Ibrahim noted that problems in Tal Afar had worsened while Mayor Najim al-Jubouri was away [NOTE: Al-Jubouri spent the month of May in the U.S. visiting with 3ACR officials]. Since November 2004, Mahmoud claimed surveys done by the tribal community and Turkoman Front showed 1,350 persons had been killed in Tal Afar, twice that number had been injured, and 3,000 to 5,000 families have fled the district. Mahmoud said over 6,000 claims for damage had also been filed with the local authorities [NOTE: PRT and provincial government estimates indicate all but 29 of the 2004 compensation claims have been paid as of May 25].

SHIITE CLAIMS: TERRORISM, NOT SECTARIAN STRIFE

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15. (C) Shia political party officials from Mosul and Tal Afar discounted claims of sectarian strife in Tal Afar. Aref Yousef of SCIRI and Waly Reda of UIC said violence in Tal Afar was caused by terrorist activities instead. Reda said security within Tal Afar itself was good and the local government had control of 90 percent of the city. However, insurgents had been pushed to surrounding areas where they were posing a very real threat to villagers. He said an attack by insurgents in Ayaziah village on May 18 killed two people. Reda said there was an incident where mortars were fired at farmers there but CF air support successfully removed the insurgents. Regardless, Reda was adamant that he considered Sunnis "brothers," and that Sunnis and Shia lived together in the area peacefully for many years. Yousef, on the other hand, claimed violence in Tal Afar was caused by terrorists and also by Kurdish aggression. He said IA 2nd and 3rd Divisions were 80 percent Kurdish, and that from experience the Kurds had been trying to "dominate" the province. Yousef asked who the "likely beneficiary" would be from all of the violence and terror in the region. He answered that the Kurds were trying to cause "chaos" so that provincial elections would be cancelled so they could assert their influence over the provincial government "again."

COMMENT

16. (C) We believe most predictions of impending chaos in Tal Afar are overblown, and agree with Mayor Najim's claim, made to us in March, that his Sunni colleagues have exaggerated "events to their advantage" (ref c). CF sources indicate terrorist activities have dropped off considerably since CF and ISF defeated AIF there in September 2005. Claims of interference by

MOI and MOD officials in Baghdad are not yet proven, but also perhaps not that farfetched as many believe given numerous examples of death squads and secret commando operations in Baghdad and southern Iraq. Tal Afar is indeed a success story, as the President has told Americans. But it is also a town fraught with nervousness, as its mixed ethnic groups struggle for accommodation with one another.

MUNTER